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Abstract

Contemporary citizenship education tends to focus on the development of skills through real experiences which has led to a relative neglect or simplification of knowledge and understanding. This article outlines a framework for analysing citizenship curricula drawing on Young’s notion of ‘powerful knowledge’ and ‘knowledge of the powerful’; and on Shulman’s account of subject knowledge, which includes substantive concepts and epistemic criteria. These ideas are used to analyse the citizenship curricula in the four nations of the UK and Ireland to assess the extent to which they provide an adequate account of knowledge and understanding of citizenship. The article concludes that it is important to reconsider the relationship between the genuinely educational aspects of citizenship education (where ‘powerful knowledge’ opens up new and diverse understandings) from the normative aims which are more akin to a form of socialization (where ‘knowledge of the powerful’ closes down certain possibilities).

Key words

Citizenship, citizenship education, civics, subject knowledge, curriculum, knowledge

The re-emergence of knowledge in curriculum studies

Debates about the curriculum have recently re-focused on the nature of knowledge, reacting against a global trend towards curriculum reform in which generic outcomes and skills were foregrounded (Priestley 2011). Young’s (2012, 2013a) concept of ‘powerful knowledge’ has

been particularly influential in this debate and he argues that school subjects are important because they provide 'epistemic access' to what is generally considered to be valuable knowledge. In response to White's criticisms that this is an essentially conservative view of the curriculum (White 2012; Brown and White 2012), Young acknowledges that these subjects do indeed operate as boundaries of constraint, but also as boundaries of possibility, in that they enable students to understand the world in different ways, and ultimately give them access to knowledge creation. Young (2013b) is adamant that such knowledge is not powerful because it leads to action (Beck 2013) nor can it develop spontaneously from action in the world, which leads him back to Vygotsky's distinction between everyday knowledge and scientific concepts. On this view, school subjects provide a means by which society can induct the next generation into traditions of knowing and thinking about the world which are powerful because they enable people to understand the world more profoundly. This implies that those concerned with the curriculum should move away from the social relations of knowledge and re-engage with the epistemological foundations of the curriculum.

Whilst Young (2012) does not exclude a role for school subjects that have no obvious single academic tradition on which to draw, his analysis represents at least two significant challenges for citizenship educators. First we have to think deeply about the nature of knowledge represented in our school subject, so that we can clearly draw on established disciplinary thinking and give access to powerful knowledge. Secondly, we have to think seriously about responding to one of the tensions identified by Beck (2013) and make convincing links between the everyday material of citizenship (and the common-sense, spontaneous understandings that arise) and the more esoteric disciplinary knowledge that will prove to be more powerful. These are linked, Young argues, because "in devising a curriculum, it is the knowledge structures where we have to start... any attempt to develop a

pedagogy that imagines it can avoid, rather than work with, the ‘epistemic constraints’ of a subject will be doomed to fail” (Young 2013, 197).

Whilst such arguments have recently been associated with conservative thinkers, such as Hirsch (1987), there are also connections to a different strand of thought represented by Bruner and Shulman. Bruner (1960) argued that being conscious of the deep structures of the subject means students can sort new knowledge into a structured pattern, which helps with memorization, establishes connections between different bits of knowledge, and ensures progression in understanding. Shulman (1988) returned to this theme and argued that teachers need to understand the structures of their subject in two ways: the *substantive* structure (the principles and concepts which organise the knowledge in a domain); and the *syntactic* structure (the rules and procedures by which knowledge is established, what we might call the epistemological foundations for the domain).

This leads us to outline a 3-dimensional view of knowledge, which might help teachers to think about how they engage with and interpret their subject areas:

1. The first dimension refers to the factual knowledge we want to teach. In Citizenship this may well involve learning about democratic institutions, roles and processes. How does one stand for election? Who stands and who gets elected? How do elected representatives relate to citizens and why does this vary? These are all answerable to some extent by relatively straightforward information.
2. The second dimension refers to Shulman’s substantive structures and deals with the core concepts that underpin and structure the subject. Here one might consider the concepts of citizen, state, power, democracy, deliberation etc. These mark out the distinctive academic territory of the subject and, importantly, it is these

concepts which are likely to enable students to perceive the usefulness of the subject. These ideas provide a flexible framework through which one can make sense of the world as a citizen. This is more powerful knowledge than the first dimension because it is of more general use and helps us to read the world in different ways.

3. The third dimension refers to this broader sense of knowing what it is to engage with an issue through the distinctive lens of citizenship. This is partly related to Shulman's notion of the epistemic rules of the game, and thus grasping what it is to argue and think politically. It is possible to approach global warming through a scientific lens, through an historical lens, or through a citizenship lens. The questions one asks and one's expectations of what would stand as a convincing answer, are influenced by the lens one adopts.

By contrast, Beck points out that some of the work undertaken in citizenship education actually appears to be 'knowledge of the powerful' as opposed to powerful knowledge in that it seeks to promote educational experiences which are "cognitively restricting – in the sense that, by design or in effect (often both), they deny students access to alternative ways of understanding" (Beck 2013, 181) and thus students are restricted in their understanding of the specific situation in which they find themselves as well as being restricted in their ability to understand the issue in general.

The revival of citizenship education in recent decades has been associated with a critique of traditional civics (which accentuates knowledge acquisition) and a focus on a newer tradition of active citizenship (which emphasises the development of skills and a normative commitment to nurture good citizens) (Jerome 2012; Kerr, McCarthy and Smith 2002). In

arguing for a new focus on knowledge I am not calling for a return to the old civics, rather I am suggesting that a proper account of citizenship education should acknowledge that knowledge and skills are inseparable. The perceived need for action does not just emerge from a common-sense understanding of everyday life, nor from some mysterious urge to action; rather, it often emerges from a deep political understanding of the world. Similarly, the kind of action that would be useful is not just a matter of somehow ‘reading off’ the contextual information and identifying the best method, this too requires some deep understanding of the nature of politics and the nature of the problem one seeks to solve. This resonates with Niemi and Junn’s (1998) conclusion that a level of civics knowledge provides the intellectual basis for engaging in public discussions and planning citizen action.

The value of comparative analysis

Citizenship education is an area which is significantly shaped by the prevailing political context, as well as the educational context (Jerome 2012; Pykett et al. 2010). This has led several authors to adopt comparative approaches to shed light on this area within the four nations of the UK. Andrews and Mycock (2007) provided an initial analysis which emphasised how citizenship has emerged with distinctive foci in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Much of their analysis was confirmed in a later study by Kisby and Sloam (2012) which described how Scotland and Wales have emerged with a stronger focus on cultural identity and community, but with a somewhat patchier curriculum commitment (relying on non-statutory advice and frameworks and embedding citizenship in other subjects). In England and Northern Ireland, whilst there is a shared commitment to explicit citizenship education, these have taken very different forms, with Northern Ireland focusing on human rights and international links, and England focusing increasingly on identity and multiculturalism (although this analysis predates the 2014 revised curriculum in England).

Andrews and Mycock's analysis indicates that the different emphases on citizenship identity in each political context may also imply different emphases on knowledge. For example, in Northern Ireland they draw attention to the curriculum's insistence that students can develop values based on "internationally recognised principles of equality, human rights, justice and democracy," whilst in England students are taught about diversity and migration. In their analysis, citizenship education in England therefore addresses knowledge which might help students understand multiculturalism and in Northern Ireland it provides students with a non-sectarian framework which can be used to build post-conflict citizenship identities.

Whilst these comparative analyses are useful in highlighting the ways in which broad conceptions of citizenship differ across the four nations of the UK, there is clearly a gap to address in relation to the ways in which knowledge is envisaged in these curricula. Whilst they have gone some way to respond to the questions 'what is the purpose of citizenship education?' and 'how is citizenship education planned?' the remaining question, 'what are students expected to know and understand about citizenship?' deserves further attention. That is the focus of the remainder of this paper which reports on an initial analysis of key curriculum documents. The documents selected for each of the countries depend on the way in which each deals with citizenship education. In England this was relatively straightforward as the new citizenship programme of study was implemented in 2014, and consists of one single short document. By contrast in Scotland, citizenship is variously dealt with as a theme, a component of other subjects, a learning aim and is promoted through guidance, websites and official reports, so the documents consulted were rather more varied. In each sub-section I have referenced the documents included in the analysis – the intention was to reflect the statutory curriculum in secondary schools as it was officially defined in each area during the

academic year 2015-16, although where changes were in the pipeline (most notably in Wales) I have indicated this. The frame adopted for the analysis was the three dimensional definition of knowledge outlined above, and the documents referenced were annotated to indicate where knowledge was explicitly referred to, and what kind of knowledge featured.

The findings build on the previous comparative analyses by focusing more explicitly on the question ‘what does each curricula define as essential knowledge for citizenship?’ and also extends the discussion to include the Republic of Ireland, which provides a further useful comparative case for understanding how curricula are constructed within specific political contexts.

England – Citizenship

In England the most recent curriculum reforms were devised to ensure that the curriculum identifies “the body of essential knowledge” all children should learn (DFE 2011) and accordingly, the programmes of study for citizenship (DFE 2013) focus primarily on the knowledge pupils should be taught. This contrasts with the previous version of the programmes of study (QCA 2007) which included a similar list of topics to be taught alongside descriptions of the ‘key processes’ (skills) and ‘key concepts’ to be developed over time. The previous distinction between topics to be taught (e.g. how laws are made, the justice system, the role of parliament etc.) and deeper subject-specific concepts (democracy, justice, rights and responsibilities, identity) provided a clear conceptual framework, which could be used as the basis of planning to ensure key concepts were revisited over time and deeper learning secured. In addition, the 2007 curriculum included skills (critical thinking and enquiry, advocacy and representation, taking informed and responsible action) intended to enable students to engage critically with ideas about citizenship.

Despite this focus on knowledge, the 2014 curriculum does refer to some concepts (democracy, government, rights and responsibilities) and skills (research and interrogate evidence, debate and evaluate viewpoints, present reasoned arguments and take informed action), although they are no longer distinguished from the list of knowledge content. This means there is some continuity with previous versions of the curriculum (Jerome and Moorse 2014), but these concepts and skills are no longer explained or expanded.

Rights and responsibilities provides a clear illustration of the difference. In 2007, the curriculum included a range of content and guidance to explain how rights developed in different contexts, often through a process of struggle, and that responsibilities varied between individuals, communities and government and thus opened up the concept to critical exploration. By contrast the 2014 curriculum limits itself to the observation that, in relation to the underlying concepts, the curriculum should ‘develop’ (at key stage 3, 11-14 year olds) and then ‘deepen’ (key stage 4, 14-16 year olds) “pupils’ understanding of... the rights and responsibilities of citizens.” In key stage 3 there are just six bullet points outlining the essential content, and two of these seem directly linked to rights and responsibilities:

- The precious liberties enjoyed by the citizens of the United Kingdom.
- The nature of rules and laws and the justice system.

At key stage 4, the knowledge also includes:

- Human rights and international law.
- The legal system in the UK... and how the law helps society deal with complex problems.

At the same time the attainment levels have been abolished, which means that this mechanism for specifying expectations of learning outcomes has been removed.

From this small example it is possible to see how the 2014 version of the curriculum presents problems in relation to its treatment of knowledge. First, there is no clarity about what treating 'rights' as a concept entails. There is no guidance regarding how one might interpret the relationship between rights and responsibilities, and no indication of how an individual's rights are held in balance with other rights and with the rights of others. In fact the only explicit reference to rights in the knowledge requirement is to human rights and international law, thus creating the possibility that this may be the only time when the language of rights is discussed explicitly. Second, despite the government's declared aim to promote greater rigour and focus on essential knowledge in the curriculum review, there is a clear ideological bias in the way these issues are framed. This is most obvious in key stage 3 where the phrase 'precious liberties enjoyed' by citizens is introduced, drawing attention to the fact that such liberties are rather passively 'enjoyed' by citizens (as opposed to the 'struggle' for rights referred to in the 2007 curriculum), and as such they should be appreciated as 'precious', which implies a somewhat reverential tone.

The citizenship curriculum in England takes a fairly unsophisticated approach to knowledge. Whilst it pays lip-service to the established language of concepts, skills and knowledge, this is undeveloped and thus is left unclear. The list of topics to be taught is focused heavily on knowledge of formal political institutions and processes (government, elections, the constitution, the legal system). In this sense one might say that the curriculum is relatively one-dimensional, in that the knowledge is largely factual and fails to engage seriously with the underlying conceptual framework. In addition we might also identify some elements of the curriculum which fall into the category of 'knowledge of the powerful'. In relation to rights, we can see how this occurred with the eradication of the idea of struggle and the

introduction of liberties to be passively enjoyed and appreciated. It is also evident when active citizenship is addressed, as volunteering, working together and improving communities are promoted as a form of ‘knowledge of the powerful’, whereas real powerful knowledge about advocacy, lobbying, campaigning or direct action is absent. In Beck’s terms (2013) there is a clear intention to close down the learning and promote specific conformist activities, as opposed to opening up the possibilities for critical exploration, which might lead to questioning, resisting and challenging as acts of citizenship.

Scotland – Social Studies and Citizenship across the curriculum

In Scotland the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) has taken a rather different approach to that pursued in England, one which may be described as being clearer on skills (e.g. leadership and problem-solving) and overall aims (e.g. to develop students as confident individuals and responsible citizens) than it is on knowledge. Priestley and Sinnema’s (2014) analysis indicates some confusion about how knowledge is to be developed across the curriculum, and they also note a desire to leave considerable scope for teachers and schools to identify the specific knowledge to be taught. This lack of clarity in the overall guidance leaves teachers “uncertain about what is most important and whether they should or should not prioritise attention to developing their students’ knowledge” (Priestley and Sinnema 2014, 69). As they indicate, whilst this is laudable in one sense, in that it places a high degree of trust in teachers’ professional authority, it also opens up the possibility that decisions about the content to be taught will be heavily influenced by the assessment system (high stakes exams) at the end of schooling. Priestley and Minty (2013) indicate that this concern with preparing for the examination is a key factor in many secondary teachers’ decisions about interpreting the CfE.

Biesta (2011) argues that citizenship is seen as a capacity to be developed through CfE, rather than as a subject to be taught, but he also points out that there is acknowledgement this entails developing “knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland’s place in it; understand[ing] different beliefs and cultures... [and] evaluat[ing] environmental, scientific and technological issues” (SE 2004, 12). Because citizenship is not presented as a subject in its own right, Biesta’s analysis of the model of citizenship promoted in the curriculum draws on high-level statements of the aims of CfE (SE 2004), a report for consultation which has been endorsed by the Minister for Education (LTS 2002) and a subsequent report from the inspectorate (HMIE 2003). These do not provide a strong, clear account of statutory provision, although taken together they do indicate the kind of model being promoted through the curriculum. On Biesta’s interpretation, this represents an individualised, responsibilised, and largely de-politicised form of citizenship to be achieved through active engagement in citizenship processes.

One immediately apparent aspect of the way citizenship is developed in CfE (ES undated on-line a) is the rather vague way it is appended to definitions of other subjects, for example, science contributes to ‘scientifically literate citizens’ (p.257); foreign languages leads to ‘global citizens’ (p.176); and technology contributes to ‘enterprising citizens’ (p.301). This means that citizenship appears everywhere but there is no specific space in which the distinctiveness of citizenship is developed. Social studies provides an important exception, where citizenship is dealt with explicitly. The ‘Principles and Practice’ document (ES, undated on-line b) specifies young people should ‘develop an understanding of the principles of democracy and citizenship through experiences of critical and independent thinking’ (p. 1) and, in the statement of ‘Experiences and Outcomes’ (ES undated on-line c), such knowledge

is fleshed out in the outcomes statements for ‘people in society, economy and business’, for example:

- “I can analyse the factors contributing to the development of a multicultural society and can express an informed view on issues associated with this.”
- “I can compare and contrast two world ideologies to express an informed view on how ideology affects the lives of people.” Further guidance encourages teachers to think about comparing capitalism, communism, fascism or other belief systems.

Against Biesta’s narrow reading of the model of citizenship, there is some evidence here that the CfE is indeed opening up the cognitive challenge, at least in relation to social change, by inviting students to demonstrate how their understanding is situated in critical readings and evolving debates.

This subject lays the foundation for the Modern Studies exam courses, and these are structured in more traditional ways, for example specifying that students must provide “descriptions and detailed explanations demonstrating knowledge and understanding, which is mainly factual but has some theoretical content” of political, social and international issues (SQA 2014, 10). Inspection evidence indicates that schools do not meet students’ entitlement to learn about ‘people in society, business or the economy’ where Modern Studies is not chosen or offered, and indeed where teachers are unclear how this theme fits into the curriculum (the other two areas of social studies are readily translated into ‘history’ and ‘geography’) (ES 2013).

Looking at CfE for clarity in relation to knowledge in the curriculum is slightly problematic therefore because in some ways the curriculum writers have set themselves against a straightforward codification of essential knowledge, and are instead encouraging teachers to

interpret the guidance using their own professional judgement and knowledge. However, by analysing the outcomes required within CfE we can observe that the curriculum encourages teachers to operate at least in two-dimensions of subject knowledge. The outcomes listed above indicate that students are expected to learn certain facts related to citizenship and also to use concepts and theories to organise and understand those facts, although the concepts that might usefully inform this endeavour are not codified. A similar point can be made in relation to the third dimension, concerning the epistemic conceptual framework. There is some evidence that the curriculum creates a space where this could be developed, for example there is a constant reiteration that knowledge is evolving and contested, there is an explicit requirement to consider alternative ideologies, and there are instructions to help students develop ‘informed opinions’. Within these broad parameters there seems to be a willingness to open up citizenship to debate and exploration rather than close down learning in order to constrain young people’s scope for considering alternatives, indeed the requirement to consider anti-democratic actions seems specifically designed to create space for this. The problem seems to emerge at the level of implementation, and there is evidence to suggest that this guidance is being interpreted rather patchily (ES 2013; Priestley and Minty 2013). This is a problem where curriculum structures create spaces of possibility rather than mandate that specific forms of knowledge should be taught. Such spaces are also potential spaces of silence and neglect and rely on teachers pursuing their own commitments and visions for the subject to make the most of the possibilities.

Wales – Personal and Social Education

Donaldson’s review of the curriculum in Wales calls for some substantial changes in aims, structure, pedagogy and assessment. He recommends that one of the four underpinning aims of the whole curriculum should be to enable children to develop as “ethical, informed citizens

of Wales and the world” (Donaldson 2015, 29) and he sees citizenship as a cross-curricular issue. His view of citizenship does not refer to citizenship knowledge specifically, rather he vaguely aspires for children to be “knowledgeable about... the world, now and in the past,” which is a laudable aim, but in reality it gives little direction to teachers about what aspects of world history and life on the planet to teach.

Whilst the review received support from the Welsh government, there is still much work to do in fleshing out the actual content of such a new curriculum and so we will focus here on the curriculum being taught at the time of writing. Citizenship is largely defined in the Personal and Social Education (PSE) Framework (DCELLS 2008) and in on-line guidance (Welsh Government on-line, undated). The aims of PSE in Wales include empowering learners to “participate in their schools and communities as active responsible citizens”; fostering “positive attitudes and behaviours towards the principles of sustainable development and global citizenship” and celebrating diversity (DCELLS 2008, 4). These aims are promoted through five themes, which include “active citizenship” and “sustainable development and global citizenship” (DCELLS 2008, 11). The active citizenship theme is largely concerned with relationships and experiences, although it does note that learners “need to develop ‘political literacy’ which enables them to make effective decisions and judgements in the world of political and legal systems” (DCELLS 2008, 11). The guidance on specific learning outcomes includes knowledge about the UNCRC, the UDHR, the principles of democracy, how the political system works (including the roles of parties and elected representatives), how to influence decision-makers, the criminal justice system, and how to recognise and challenge prejudice. The sustainability and global citizenship theme includes learning about concepts such as energy use, climate change, biodiversity and global poverty as well as learning about the links between society, the economy and the

environment. The guidance on this theme specifies children should learn about poverty and inequality, interdependence, the tensions between economic growth and sustainable development, global issues which threaten the planet, and conflict.

There is an emphasis throughout on what children are expected to do with this information and all the content is linked with experiences. The first-dimension of knowledge is clear, with a list of things to know such as the differences between political parties, or the ways in which young people come into contact with the criminal justice system. There is also evidence of the second-dimension being addressed through broad concepts such as democracy, rights and responsibilities, interdependence, globalisation etc. As with the English example, these are listed as equivalent elements of what constitutes citizenship knowledge, which does tend to reduce the extent to which teachers would recognise the difference between them and use the latter to provide organisational structure to their teaching. The third dimension is captured in some references to 'thinking skills' in generic (cross-curricular) guidance, which encourages teachers to teach about the differences between fact, opinion and belief; explain cause and effect; evaluate media; and understand how different perspectives affect decisions and judgements. If applied in the context of citizenship, these skills would address some of the epistemic criteria used to construct and interpret knowledge claims in citizenship. Evidence from Estyn, the Welsh inspectorate, indicates that there has been some progress in provision in relation to education for sustainable development and global citizenship and reports that children are more aware of these ideas than they were a decade ago. However, it also identifies the conceptual foundation of these subjects as being under-developed – both in children's understanding, and in many teachers' knowledge of the issues (Keane 2015). This is unsurprising given that the conceptual framework is relatively undeveloped in the curriculum itself. This weakness is likely to be compounded by the fact that these themes

constitute just two out of a total of five themes in the overall PSE framework, especially when one considers the low status accorded to PSE in many schools.

Northern Ireland – Learning for Life and Work

As with Wales, the curriculum in Northern Ireland embeds citizenship as a theme in a larger (low status) subject. In Northern Ireland ‘local and global citizenship’ has been included as one of three themes within the wider subject of ‘Learning for Life and Work’ since 2007. The local and global title for the citizenship theme clearly sidesteps the problematic nature of ‘national’ citizenship which, for the citizens of Northern Ireland, continues to be a contentious issue. The pragmatic reasons for pairing local and global like this in a divided society are also complemented by the intention that the notion of global citizenship can provide a unifying citizenship identity which the nation cannot provide. However, there are also well known challenges in getting these two perspectives to coalesce. The mantra of ‘act local, think global’ can often lead to relatively minor de-politicised behaviour changes, for example turning off the light, not leaving the television on standby or recycling paper as a response to global warming, with no deeper sense of the political nature of the problem. Or it simply turns into a form of “intellectual tourism” (Roman 2003) in which students learn about the lives of the distant ‘other’ and occasionally participate in acts of charity, which can again ignore more critical perspectives on inequality and side-line the political dimension to citizenship action (Waldron et al. 2011). One small scale study in Northern Ireland documented both these phenomenon among a group of secondary students – they knew about some global problems, but had a relatively superficial grasp of how these connected to their lives in Northern Ireland (Niens and Reilly 2012).

The curriculum itself offers a fairly robust account of the subject, certainly the most developed we have considered so far in terms of specifying the conceptual framework underpinning citizenship. The curriculum for key stage 3 (11-14 year olds) is organised around four key concepts (second dimension of knowledge), each of which is then exemplified by specific areas of content to be related to those concepts (first dimension). The four organising concepts are expressed as pairs: diversity and inclusion; human rights and social responsibility; equality and social justice; and democracy and active citizenship (CCEA undated a). One can discern much clearer thinking behind these headings than was evident in other curricula, for example, the phrase ‘human rights and social responsibility’ clearly challenges the somewhat general assertions that ‘rights and responsibilities’ must always be linked. This phrasing is compatible with the notion that an individual’s human rights are the responsibility of the state, and are not directly dependent on that individual living up to their responsibilities in some way; it also acknowledges that citizens do have social responsibilities to one another (some specifically codified in law, others implied by an assumed social contract). This more nuanced thinking is evident in the suggested content which includes learning about various human rights instruments, learning about the nature of those rights (e.g. individual and group rights; limitations on rights) and applying the concept of social responsibility to consider the extent to which governments and individuals *should* act. Taking ‘democracy and active participation’ as a second example, the content specifies children should learn about the rule of law, the promotion of equality and the nature of laws and justice as specific characteristics of democracy; and specifies a variety of forms of action, including school-based participation, community action, lobbying, campaigning, working through NGOs and dealing with elected representatives.

McEvoy (2007) documents a process of ‘to-ing and fro-ing’ in the formation of the curriculum as teacher workshops linked to the roll-out of citizenship education elicited feedback which led to refinements in the curriculum, thus explaining how the concepts and content came to be so well-aligned in this curriculum. McEvoy also notes that the new curriculum represented a step-change to the ‘Education for Mutual Understanding’ curriculum initiative which preceded ‘local and global citizenship’ because the former focused on individual prejudice and did not refer to human rights principles. Whilst arguing that references to human rights ‘as values’ rather than as an ‘accountability mechanism’ are problematic, McEvoy also observes that the focus on human rights is a powerful discourse through which to frame and address conflict, and thus is particularly significant in Northern Ireland.

As with the other examples we have looked at, the third dimension of powerful knowledge is not addressed explicitly, however, there are clear indications in this curriculum of the distinctive nature of citizenship knowledge and understanding. This is reflected, for example, in the requirement to study issues from a range of viewpoints, which helps to indicate how the more general skills of investigation, critical and flexible thinking, and creativity might be applied in the context of citizenship study. Taken together these indicate that multiple perspectives on the same issue are an essential element of thinking about citizenship, and that these are all equally valid ways to understand a problem. Such issues are further promoted in the key stage 4 non-statutory guidance (14-16 year olds) which specifies students should be encouraged to develop “a more critical and discriminatory response to the information they discover” and “identify and compare the values and viewpoints of self and others” (CCEA undated b, 41). This is clearly important to democratic citizenship education in any context, but in Northern Ireland it provides an essential framework for understanding the social and

political divisions which are still prevalent. However, as McEvoy points out, establishing an appropriate framework is not the same as ensuring all students will consider the distinctive legacy of the conflict within the context of a transitional society. This lack of explicitness leaves open the possibility that a ‘culture of avoidance’ will persist (McEvoy 2007, 147).

Ireland – Civic, Social and Political Education

In the Republic of Ireland citizenship forms part of ‘Civic, Social and Political Education’ (CSPE) in the junior cycle (12-15 year olds). The curriculum is being reformed at the time of writing and CSPE, which was introduced as a mandatory subject in 1996 (Keating 2009), is now an optional short course (DES 2012) and will revert to teacher assessment in 2017, with the examination being phased out (DES 2014). This indicates that, as with the other curricula we have considered so far, the low-status of the subject continues to be a limiting factor in translating intentions into reality (Bruen 2014).

Keating notes that the introduction of CSPE marked a move away from a traditional national model of citizenship and the adoption of a more cosmopolitan approach embracing the principles of international human rights and recognising that citizenship is played out in different communities and at different levels (Keating 2009, 170). Knowledge is foregrounded in the course objectives, including the acquisition of “basic knowledge and understanding” in a range of content (our first dimension of knowledge). CSPE as a whole is divided into four areas, each of which is closely associated with one or more of seven key concepts: the area labelled ‘the individual and citizenship’ is linked to human dignity and stewardship; ‘the community’ as an area of study is linked to the concept of democracy; ‘the state – Ireland’ is linked to rights and responsibilities, democracy and the law; and the final area ‘Ireland and the world’ is linked to development and interdependence (NCCA undated).

Whilst on the face of it, these form the second dimension of subject knowledge and provide valuable organising concepts for teachers, the definitions convey some characteristics of ‘knowledge of the powerful’ as opposed to ‘powerful knowledge.’ For example, in defining democracy the curriculum writers assert “non-participation or exclusion can lead to alienation, apathy and lack of responsibility”, and the definition of rights and responsibilities includes the phrase “responsibilities go hand in hand with the rights accorded to individuals” (NCCA undated, 10). In these kind of assertions the curriculum moves beyond an account of what the concepts mean and how they are used in legitimate debates about democratic politics, and instead, by advocating that teachers teach these normative assertions as fact, the curriculum ultimately promotes a form of cognitive closure.

The skills specified in the curriculum hint at the third dimension of powerful knowledge by defining the subject as an area where students identify relevant issues and sources of information; analyse and evaluate such information; communicate with others in a range of ways and undertake action using social and political skills. In the final category one can see the most direct reference yet to specific skills related to “political organising, procedure, and decision-making” (NCCA undated, 13). This clarification of the kind of perspective represented by citizenship is also evident in the section defining desirable attitudes and values, which discusses the importance of students developing an appreciation of critical awareness and independence of thought, an appreciation of, and respect for, differing viewpoints, ideas and cultures, and a respect for critical thought processes and non-violent ways of resolving conflict and achieving change (NCCA undated, 14). However, the tension between this and the more restrictive conceptual definitions noted above, leaves some uncertainty as to the overall approach likely to be adopted.

Are young citizens accessing powerful knowledge?

Whilst previous analyses of citizenship education have tended to focus on the broad aspirations and aims of the subject, or on the skills and processes envisaged as the means by which citizenship would be learned, this analysis has sought to redress the balance by reconsidering the role of knowledge in such curricula. In the first section I made two key points about such knowledge. The first concerned the extent to which a curriculum was either designed to promote a form of ‘knowledge of the powerful’ (which closes down debate and promotes passive learning of what are essentially normative assertions), or by contrast, the extent to which the curriculum promotes a form of ‘powerful knowledge’ (designed to provide students with a useful conceptual framework for thinking about citizenship and for generating insights into a range of issues). The second point expanded this notion of powerful knowledge to consider such knowledge in relation to three dimensions: (i) a basic grasp of relevant knowledge; (ii) a conceptual framework for organising such knowledge; and (iii) a sense of how citizenship differs from other forms of knowledge or ways of seeing the world – the epistemic rules of citizenship. The purpose of this approach is not to ignore the importance of promoting active citizenship, debate and discussion, but rather to return to a core educational function, the development of knowledge, in the belief that any form of debate or action actually draws on a deep understanding of citizenship.

The foregoing analysis has indicated that there is a wide variety of practice in the construction of curricula. There is little consensus about how to design a curriculum, and relatively little about how to define citizenship. Nevertheless, across the five nations of England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland, there are some indications of how these three dimensions of powerful knowledge might be conceived, as well as some salutary warnings of practices that might be avoided.

In relation to the first dimension of powerful knowledge, it is perhaps unsurprising that all curricula make explicit reference to the kind of knowledge to be gained through citizenship education (although it requires some interpretation in the Scottish case). Typically these curricula refer to the legal system, to elections, and to government in some shape or form, as well as to various forms of citizen action. The unique circumstances of each nation influence the specific requirements here, for example, in Ireland there is an explicit discussion of Ireland as a distinctive nation within Europe, but no reference to the North; similarly in Northern Ireland, there is discussion of local and European elected representatives, but no mention of the role of MPs and Westminster government; whilst in Wales councillors, AMs, MPs and MEPs are all mentioned. So even here, at the most basic level of describing the ‘things citizens should know’ there are examples of curriculum structures which evade prescription, and examples of content knowledge which is omitted because of political sensitivities. Whilst one may understand how these omissions came to be made, one must question the extent to which such omissions contribute to the knowledge and understanding required for informed citizenship.

One is struck here by the mismatch between the lofty aims proclaimed in all these curricula, and the selective account of knowledge provided. All five curricula make bold statements about the central role of citizenship to the curriculum:

- In England, the curriculum “provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge that they need to be educated citizens” (opening sentence of England’s curriculum aims (DFE 2014: 5));
- In Scotland, the curriculum develops “responsible citizens” (one of four capacities underpinning the whole curriculum (Scottish Government 2008: 22));

- In Ireland the curriculum should lead all students to “value what it means to be an active citizen” (one of 24 statements of learning across the whole curriculum (DES 2012: 6);
- In Wales, the curriculum should enable young people to become “ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world” (proposed aims in Welsh curriculum review (Donaldson 2015, 29));
- And in Northern Ireland, the curriculum is based on a shared commitment to “value equality, justice and human rights within our society and our capacity as citizens to resolve conflict by democratic means” (overall values statement in the curriculum (CCEA 2007: 2).

And yet, much of the information required to meet these objectives is being withheld from young people, or is being presented in ways which restrict their capacity for fully understanding citizenship. This is problematic pragmatically, in that it creates a disjunction between the aims and content of the curriculum; but it is also problematic in terms of young people’s own citizenship, and is certainly questionable in relation to children’s right to “seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds” (Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN 1989). In discussing the introduction of citizenship in England the Crick Report took the view that:

Education should not attempt to shelter our nation’s children from even the harsher controversies of adult life, but should prepare them to deal with such controversies knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally (QCA 1998, 56).

This alternative perspective indicates that the missing knowledge in these curricula may have considerable implications for young people’s understanding of citizenship.

In relation to the second dimension of powerful knowledge, all of the curricula include substantive concepts, such as democracy, rights, and responsibilities, but not all of them differentiate clearly between these organising concepts and the individual items of knowledge to be learned. This seems to be a flaw in curriculum design overall in some places, rather than simply a ‘citizenship’ problem. The Northern Ireland curriculum stands out as being the most developed statement in this regard with a clear use of substantive concepts to organise the learning; here there is a clarity which helps the teacher to think about how content is related to overarching concepts. The Northern Ireland example also attempts to present the connections between the content and concepts in a relatively neutral way (making conceptual connections) rather than making normative or ideological interpretations (as in the Irish example), or referring to concepts but leaving them undeveloped (as in the English example). By way of illustration we might take the example of rights, which has been discussed in relation to several of the curricula already. In Northern Ireland the curriculum makes it clear that teachers should set out the agreements which establish the foundation for international human rights, consider the ways in which such rights are balanced against one another, and study examples where rights are infringed. They should also consider whose responsibility it is to act to uphold rights, including government duties and the responsibility of individuals and society more generally. The concept of rights in the curriculum mirrors the complexity of rights in reality – that rights are rarely absolute and have to be balanced in different contexts; that agreeing and implementing rights are separate processes; and that rights require somebody to have responsibilities to uphold them, and that such responsibilities may be specific and legal (e.g. state duties) or general and social (e.g. individuals’ responsibilities to respect others’ rights). By contrast, the English invitation to learn about “precious liberties”, does not reflect any of these elements of conceptual understanding, in fact it draws attention away from the complexity of rights. In Ireland the definition of knowledge in the CSPE

curriculum refers only to the “rights and responsibilities of every person as a citizen” (NCCA undated, 9) and in the later account of the concept this oversimplification is exacerbated by the phrase “responsibilities go hand in hand with the rights accorded to individuals... Irresponsibility results in... careless actions which can be damaging to other people” (NCCA undated, 10). In these two examples we can see how the curriculum distorts or misrepresents the concept. There is an objective account of the concept of rights, which draws on political philosophy, ethics and international law but only the Northern Irish curriculum comes close to dealing with that, the other examples present an ideological interpretation of the concept, which obfuscates the real meaning and imposes a narrower reading – what we have referred to as knowledge of the powerful.

This is important because, as Bruner and Shulman argued, the conceptual structure of the subject provides the basis for claims that such knowledge can be powerful, i.e. it can be used to shed light on any political or controversial problem. A good understanding of the nature of rights, of the contested nature of democracy, of the problems of securing justice, or of the challenge of sustainability can be used to better frame and understand any new issue with which one is confronted, which one might not have studied directly. The absence of this kind of conceptual framework makes the various curricular claims to be promoting ‘responsible citizenship’ seem rather hollow – on what basis will young people understand, judge, or act? How does one understand a rights infringement, or government laxity in protecting minority rights, if one’s understanding of rights is limited to a sense of personal responsibility, or an appreciation of one’s precious liberties? Understanding the complexity of the process of implementation, the political nature of conflicting rights claims, and the precise nature of state duties constitute essential knowledge to underpin a proper understanding and therefore may also be seen as precursors to informed action.

The third dimension of powerful knowledge is also relatively undeveloped. However, there are hints at what kind of perspective is provided by citizenship as a lens on the world, and what counts as a good argument or claim to knowledge. These are frequently discussed in relation to generic thinking skills, but typically include exhortations to consider different forms of evidence, critically assess such evidence, develop informed opinions, be open to alternative points of view, tolerate differences and seek to understand them. Whilst generally framed as citizenship skills, it is evident that these skills can only be developed in relation to specific citizenship content and concepts. Where the links to such skills are outlined separately, they do create the slight risk that such skills may be treated somewhat superficially – learning techniques for public speaking or learning by rote how to justify an argument. But where the skills are discussed in relation to specific content, it seems that the citizenship connection is better developed. An example of this deeper connection is provided by the Scottish curriculum's outcome statements, e.g. "I can contribute to a discussion on the extent to which people's needs should be met by the state or the individual" (ES undated online c, 12). The potentially synthesising role of such a formulation is frustrated by the lack of clarity in the first two dimensions of knowledge, in other words, the Scottish curriculum has little to say about what would constitute a good contribution to such a debate – what knowledge is essential to understanding the relationship between the individual and the state?

We have seen that these curricula by and large fuse (or confuse) the normative messages of *good* citizenship with the more prosaic knowledge base for *informed* citizenship. There is a danger here that this transforms the curriculum into a statement of knowledge of the powerful as opposed to powerful knowledge. This is an important matter because, whilst it may be perfectly legitimate to promote the values of democratic citizenship, it is equally important to

be clear when one is doing so. If a teacher sets out to teach a subject as though it were open and exploratory, whilst in reality they seek to close down a student's understanding, this sets up citizenship education as a site of dishonesty and hypocrisy. Thinking seriously about this challenge and being open to the powerful nature of knowledge prompts us to remember that schools are places for learning not just for socialization. The three dimensional model is one way to assess the extent to which the curriculum serves the purpose of establishing this essential knowledge for citizenship and thus the extent to which it guides teachers to support young people's development as informed citizens. This analysis demonstrates that there may still be some way to go to develop curricula which are appropriate to this task.

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